SECTION 8
SIX PAGES

# The Sun.

Drama—Music—Gardens

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# In The PLAYS of the New Year

EDITH DAY IN "IRENE"

The COUNTRY FAIR SCENE of "FRIVOLITIES of 1920"

DOLORES
IN ZIEGFELD MIDNIGHT FROLIC.

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

THE frenzied theatre stands at the beginning of another year panting, as it were, on the leash for a start at the greater enterprises which have been already laid out for it. Its activities are, it appears, to be much greater. The entrepreneurs have been explaining that the city is "undertheatred," as if there really could be such a word in all the world. The condition may seem bad enough, but it never could in reality be as bad as the word. Even an argot that has created "premier" and "picturization" could scarcely expect the world to accept "undertheatred" seriously. Yet we will pretend to know what it means. Next season there will be more playhouses, the hide and seek between art and real estate will be more baffling than ever, and there will be many more plays and many more actors in them.

But the theatre has made no new resolutions for this New Year. It never has made any, but has continued in the path that its patrons laid down for it. The dramatic critic in "The Green Carnation" who stood waving at the mob which was running all the while in one direction and in vain telling it to run in the other was a curious derelict. The dramatic critic of the day who is not occupied in the now laborious task of giving the glad hand to the numerous theatrical experiments that claim his attention does not give advice. He allows the public to select what it wants, just as it has always done with or without advice.

It is just this determined attitude on the part of the public that has kept the theatre what it is and has been in the English speaking countries for generations. It is the public that determines what the character of the Muse of the Drama shall be in one country or another. There may have been times in England when she had to say prunes and prisms before the curtain went up in order that she might not offend the proprieties. Maybe the bars are down more or less since that time. If she is willing to turn her back on the drama either here or in London she may do very much as she likes in the matter of apparel and gesture. She must ever exercise a certain squeamishness as to her conversation. In other details of deportment she can in the review or the musical play be her own mistress.

If there are more reviews and musical plays than there are plays of any other kind just now it is because the public wants to see them on the stage rather than anything else. So what in the thunder would be the good of having the theatre swear to turn over a new leaf when it is really another audience that decides? It is not only in the preponderance of music and drama that the will of the theatregoer is final. His enjoyment of every special brand of drama prevails. His taste has not changed in years. He enjoys the same best sellers that delighted him years ago. The taste in the English speaking theatre to-day is just what it was in the days of Tom Robertson and his series of teacup dramas. The sentiment of "Caste" is the sentiment that the theatregoer loves to-day. In form there must necessarily be a change. But as for the essentials there is a longing for the same emotions and for the same alternate blend of humor and pathos. Were the psychology of "Frou Frou" utilized in a manner more to the taste of the sophisticated public of the day it would triumph as of old.

There are no new demands from the drama unless it be that certain unessential conditions disappear. Possibly there is no reason to expect that the theatre should have improved when there has been no noticeable change for the better in other forms of fiction. The popular novel of the day is the popular novel of yesteryear changed in the mode and in its modes. Here the analogy fails because there have been some names in literature, Thackeray, Dickens, Meredith, Hardy and perhaps a little further down are to be found fames that endure with the set brilliancy of stars. Of course, the stage has none of these, since their derived glory at intervals cannot be said to belong to it. To-day it can glory in an occasional work by J. M. Barrie, although that distinction is rapidly becoming only historical. Yet not all the popular works of fiction were by men so noted as those named here. Thousands of well beloved tomes in their day came from men no nearer fame than the authors of our popular plays.

No, the theatre will take no resolutions. It will not change. It cannot, since its motives to action come from sources it does not control. There is no indication that the people who decide what the theatre shall be has the slightest intention of changing in its tastes. So even when we have ceased to be "undertheatred" there will probably be little change. The quality will remain the same, while the quantity will be, oh, ever so much increased. But there will be no new resolutions.

In the meantime there need be no cause for despair. There are some current plays that lift the writing of the theatre well into the class of the sort of fiction that comes between covers. There is "The Jest," in which Edward Sheldon has done a notably fine bit of writing. Booth Tarkington has transferred life in the terms of genuine literature to the stage in "Clarence." "Abraham Lincoln," while it has marked shortcomings as drama, possesses quality in its writing that savors of real nobility. So there is something in these three plays to encourage the pessimist who fears that real estate is sometimes allowed to blacken out the art in our theatre.

Then there is in all the numerous playhouses of New York a high degree of technical skill. There may be few flashes of genius. But the acting is generally of a higher degree of finish than some of that seen in the so-called palmy days of our stage. Plays are certainly superior in their pretended reflection of life. It is not alone in the theatre that the geniuses are in this generation more or less slow to arrive. The same is true in the other arts. A high degree of technical facility is often present in music when there is no deep genius for interpretation. The state of the theatre is scarcely worse. It too is of the times. Then in a greater degree than any other art it is dependent on the degree to which it fulfils its purpose in entertaining others. So, after all, it may not be necessary for the drama to tur nover any new leaf this year.

### A Play a Week.

**Gilbert & Sullivan return to the repertoire of the Society of American Singers at the Park Theatre this week. The delightful "Iolanthe" will be sung. The last previous representations of the work were at the Casino by W. A. Brady's company. There will be alternate casts for these works, so as to have the singers in good voice for every performance.**

**If William A. Brady had not been so impetuous he might have given his successful melodrama another name. "The Man Who Came Back" will be at the Shubert Riviera this week. How about the play that came back, what?**

CHRYSTAL HERNE IN "THE AQUITTAL."

### ITALIAN DRAMATIC TECHNIC.

"THE Italian technic versus the American—that is a big subject for one who is only a beginner on the American stage," answered Mimi Aguglia in response to the question of THE SUN representative. The interviewer had been conducted to the mysterious backstage regions of the Standard Theatre, where Mme. Aguglia was the centre of first night excitement on the occasion of her debut as the star of a play in English.

"It has always been my ambition to act in English," said Mme. Aguglia, "as it is the ambition of nearly every continental actress. I have played in Italian, French, Portuguese and Spanish many times, but I have always kept before me as a sort of goal my desire to act in the English language. 'English is difficult,' warned my father, who is also an actor. 'Act in America in your own language, but do not attempt the English tongue.' But my father's advice only spurred me on. I was determined to master English after I had been told that it was impossible. I was also determined not to speak English with the pigeon accent which is too often the mark of the foreign actress, and for the latter determination I am indebted to the great Charles Frohman.

"When Mr. Frohman brought me to America nine years ago to play in his Sicilian company at the Broadway Theatre I told him of my great desire to act in English. At that time my English vocabulary consisted of words of one syllable only; and I spoke with the accent that is usually characteristic of foreigners. It was then that Mr. Frohman advised me to go to an American school of expression in order that I might learn to speak English carefully and slowly, and so that I might find it easier to master American modes of inflection. I have always remembered one significant remark of Mr. Frohman's: that the foreigner, no matter how perfectly he masters English vowels and consonants, can generally be detected by his failure to observe the inflections of the Anglo-Saxon voice. Accordingly, at the suggestion of Mr. Frohman, I entered the College of the Spoken Word in Boston, where I spent seven months of very hard study. Then Mr. Fort gave me my big chance to play in English in 'The Whirlwind.'

"Curiously enough my first appearance on the stage was in French, although I was born in Italy of Italian parents. My father and mother were themselves of the stage, and when I was 5 years old I made my theatrical debut with a company of French players who were in Palermo playing in 'The Fall of the Bastille.' I was soon given an opportunity to play in Italian, however, and when I was 7 years old I toured Italy with Giacinta Pezzana. I played numerous child parts in Italian, French and Spanish drama until I was 15, when I was offered an engagement as leading woman for Giovannia Grasso, a popular Italian star of the day.

"My association with Signor Grasso led to more important engagements, and soon I was touring the capitals of Europe in the masterpieces of D'Annunzio, Sudermann, Ibsen, Guimera, Benavente and Sardou. I also played Shakespeare in Italian for Edward VII. in London. I had the honor of being the only foreign actress to appear at the Teatro Espanol in Madrid, and I have played before most of the Kings of Europe—in the days when there were Kings," she added with a smile.

"Many people have asked me your question about the difference between American and Italian dramatic technic. I think that the chief difference is that in a company of continental players the 'personal equation' is not so pronounced as it is in American casts. The foreign actress is not interested in herself personally nor in what her audience thinks of her half so much as she is interested in the artistic whole of which her role is only a small part.

"The Italian player concentrates all his energies to portray an emotion by repression rather than by the more vigorous American fashion of forcing his personality over the footlights, and we try to make our silence more eloquent than our words. If any one member of a continental company is conspicuous it is because the character he interprets gives him that prominence. Because of the absence of personal exploitation European companies are often more carefully balanced than American companies.

"Over here, if I may be permitted to say so, the personal element has more sway. A player need not have quite so much histrionic ability if her appearance, her personality or some other personal trait has won popularity. The personal following is what so many of your American managers count on, and in a way they are right, too, for personality counts more with the American people than with any other people in the world. Players here cater more to their audiences in a direct, personal way; they seldom lose their own personalities in projecting their stage beings across the footlights; in some miraculous manner, I think, they combine the two, and so doing make each one stronger.

"I am happy to be an American, even temporarily," adds Mme. Aguglia in her gracious Italian manner, "and I too hope to win some of your wonderful American 'personal following.'"

CLARA JOEL IN "THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."

### THE WEEK'S OFFERINGS.

**MONDAY—Booth Theatre: Leo Ditrichstein comes back to Broadway and goes back to the Napoleonic era in "The Purple Mask," a romantic melodrama by Matheson Lang reduced to English from the French of Paul Armont and Jean Manoussi. Brandon Tynan, Lilly Cahill and Ann MacDonald are others whom Lee Shubert has apportioned among the Royalists and the common people.**

**Lyric Theatre: "The Light of the World," a drama by Pierre Saisson dealing with the central character of a Swiss Passion Play working out modern problems along ethical lines, will be presented by F. Ray Comstock and Morris Gest at a strictly invitation performance for clergymen and prominent city and State officials, with the public allowed an opening on Tuesday. Pedro de Cordoba, Ralph Kellard, Clara Joel and Percy Haswell will be allowed in on the first night, however.**

**Cohan & Harris Theatre: Sam H. Harris will return "The Acquittal," by Rita Weiman, with Chrystal Herne up for judgment.**

**Central Theatre: Arthur Hammerstein will turn out "Always You," a musical play organized from book and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II. and music by Herbert P. Stothart. Ralph Herz, Walter Scanlon, Anna Seymour and Julia Kelety will reveal how a girl from Arkansas can make France hum—and New York also.**

**TUESDAY—Forty-fourth Street Theatre. "Frivolities of 1920," egged on by G. M. Anderson, will have Henry Lewis, Nellie and Sara Kouns, the Barr Twins and many others to spread out over the music and lyrics by William B. Friedlander, Harry Auracher and Tom Johnstone and the book for which William Anthony McGuire holds the key.**

**WEDNESDAY—Maxine Elliott's Theatre: A. H. Woods will put on the market "Ready to Occupy," a farce comedy by Otto Harbach filtered through Edgar Franklin. Ernest Truex will help himself to a large part of the dialogue.**

### BOBBIE WATSON IN "IRENE."

NEXT TO Edith Day's creation of the shop girl *Cinderella* in "Irene" quite the most novel and interesting dramatic character of the year is the man modist who, under the trade name of *Madame Lucy*, does a thriving business among the New York smart set depicted in the same musical comedy. *Madame Lucy*, does a thriving business among James Montgomery, the author of the Vanderbilt Theatre production has taken a type heretofore regarded as the legitimate butt of ridicule for the world at large, and by sheer artistry lifted him into the realm of poetry; and because Bobby Watson, the young actor who portrays him, is doubly blessed in being possessed of a poet's imagination plus a sort of Lewis Carroll sense of the ludicrous. Indeed without those qualifications on the part of *Madame Lucy's* portrayer, this delightfully whimsical creation might very easily, as the first night critics agreed, become offensive instead of the joyous and mirthful thing it is.

As for Bobbie Watson—which, by the way, is his real name—he has had a career that in itself reads like a romance. His "home town" as he calls it, is Springfield, Illinois, where he was born thirty-one years ago, not very far away from the famous Lincoln house, one of the windows of which he had the ineffable pleasure of smashing with a well aimed stone some eight years later. For the breaking of that window Bobbie Watson's father, a conservative and law abiding post office official, paid the city fathers of Springfield five hard earned dollars. He also, by his own volition, publicly apologized for the irreverence of his offspring, for to him the name and memory of Abraham Lincoln were sacred things as they are to-day to his son, with whom afterward he dealt privately in the woodshed in the good old-fashioned manner.

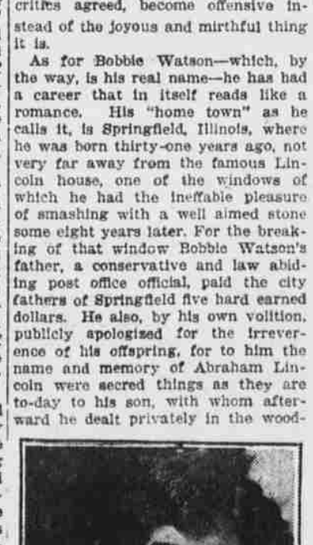
At the age of 10 Mr. Bobbie surreptitiously got the concession for selling peanuts Saturday afternoons in Springfield's one and only dance hall known as the Olympic Theatre, and by the age of 12 he had the evening concession as well, his family still being under the delusion that he was adding to his education by attending a special course in mathematics at the Y. M. C. A. At the Olympic the young peanut vender literally absorbed such art of the theatre as the place afforded. He studied minutely all the tricks of the members of the many travelling companies and of the vaudeville performers booked by the house, and when he reached the age of 15 the manager of the Olympic gave him a chance to show what he could do on the stage. The boy did a double turn that evening, first as a black face comedian and then as a drunken Irishman, and he did both of them so well that he was immediately put on the Olympic's payroll as an actor, much to the disgust of his father and the consternation of his mother and sisters.

One night the manager of an itinerant medicine show that had pitched its tent on a vacant lot near the theatre, saw the son of the house of Watson do a blackface turn, involving the singing of a song and a clog dance. He offered the young man $10 a week and his board, with a comfortable sleeping bunk in the big four horse drawn wagon. Bobbie Watson jumped at the offer. He was earning only $6 per week at the Olympic, where he was now beginning to realize he had little opportunity to advance himself. Chicago was his objective at that time. He had never been to Chicago, he had never been anywhere, and the manager of the Kickapoo Remedies show hinted that they might hit the Windy City before "snow flies."

To the experience gained during the year he travelled with this extraordinary outfit Watson attributes all the success he has since won in Broadway, first in "Going Up" and now in his present highly sophisticated role in "Irene." For twelve months the little caravan of strolling players travelled up and down and across the middle West, and in those twelve months the youth from Springfield not only tried his skill at every conceivable role but he made a careful study of the psychology of audiences, although the word psychology was not yet in his vocabulary. There being no critics delegated to "cover" the Kickapoo "first nights," the young actor rushed in where angels would have feared to tread. At Sedalia, Mo., for instance, where the Kickapoos exhibited for two weeks, he bought a copy of Shakespeare and learned the part of *Rosalind* overnight, and the next evening he and an old actor who had joined up with the show gave a special performance for the benefit of a coeducational institution in the neighborhood, the young ladies of which the simple minded showman believed he might attract by injecting something highbrow into the programme. The young ladies didn't come, but the masculine part of the institution turned out to a man, including several of the faculty. One of the latter, a young Yale man, sought *Rosalind* after the show and took him to a neighboring bar for a drink. He also gave him a wise word of advice, which was to the effect that he was wasting his talents in the interest of medicine and that he ought to have no difficulty in getting a much better job in Chicago.

Whereupon Bobbie Watson hied him to Chicago two weeks later, immediately got a job with a vaudeville company just being booked from there for a tour of the larger Western cities, where in the years to follow his name was to become almost a household word among vaudeville fans. Not until 1916 did it ever occur to him that there might be a field for him in the East, and then Gus Edwards came along with an offer of a job in one of his revues, and in 1917 he made his New York debut at the Hotel Martinique, later appearing under the same management at Henderson's in Coney Island. At the latter resort he was discovered by Cohan & Harris, who were looking for an actor to follow Frank Craven in "Going Up," and last season under that management he made his debut in Broadway, where he seems destined to remain as one of the really worth while "finds" of theatredom.

Lotta Linthicum, who as a young actress had her training in the French theatre and later was understudy for Ada Rehan and leading woman with Miss Rehan's brother, has made her debut on the musical stage in "The Little Whopper." Although she studied voice with Marchesi, Miss Linthicum has never before ventured into musical comedy. Her last Broadway success was as the coquettish widow of "The Tailor Made Man." In her present role she is the naive *Mrs. Macgregor*, wife of the veracious *Judge Macgregor*, and mother of a young lady daughter. Miss Linthicum sings in only one number, but her speaking voice is itself an asset to the musical stage. Also in "The Little Whopper" Miss Linthicum has the opportunity to display lovely gowns.



NANCY FAIR IN "READY TO OCCUPY."

ANNA SEYMOUR
WITH
"JOAN OF ARKANSAW"

### PLAYS THAT LAST.

Astor, "East Is West"; Belasco, "The Son-Daughter"; Bijou, "His Honor Abe Potash"; Broadhurst, "Smilin' Through"; Casino, "The Little Whopper"; Century, "Aphrodite"; Century Roof, "Midnight Whirl"; Comedy, "My Lady Friends"; Cort, "Abraham Lincoln"; Criterion, "One Night in Rome"; Eltinge, "The Girl in the Limousine"; Empire, "Declassee"; Forty-eighth Street, "The Storm"; Fulton, "Linger Longer Letty"; Gaiety, "Lightnin'"; George M. Cohan, Elsie Janis; Globe, "Apple Blossoms"; Greenwich Village "Curiosity"; Harris, "Wedding Bells"; Henry Miller's, "The Famous Mrs. Fair"; Hudson, "Clarence"; Knickerbocker, "Angel Face"; Liberty, "Cæsar's Wife"; Longacre, "Adam and Eva"; Lyceum, "The Gold Diggers"; Manhattan Opera House, "Forbidden"; Morosco, "Civilian Clothes"; New Amsterdam, "Monsieur Beaucaire"; New Amsterdam Roof, "Nine o'Clock Revue" and "Midnight Frolic"; Nora Bayes, "Greenwich Village Follies"; Playhouse, "For the Defense"; Plymouth, "The Jest"; Princess, "Nightie Night"; Punch and Judy, "Miss Millions"; Republic, "The Sign on the Door"; Shubert, "The Magic Melody"; Selwyn, "Buddies"; Standard, "The Whirlwind"; Thirty-ninth Street, "Scandal"; Vanderbilt, "Irene"; Winter Garden, "Passing Show."